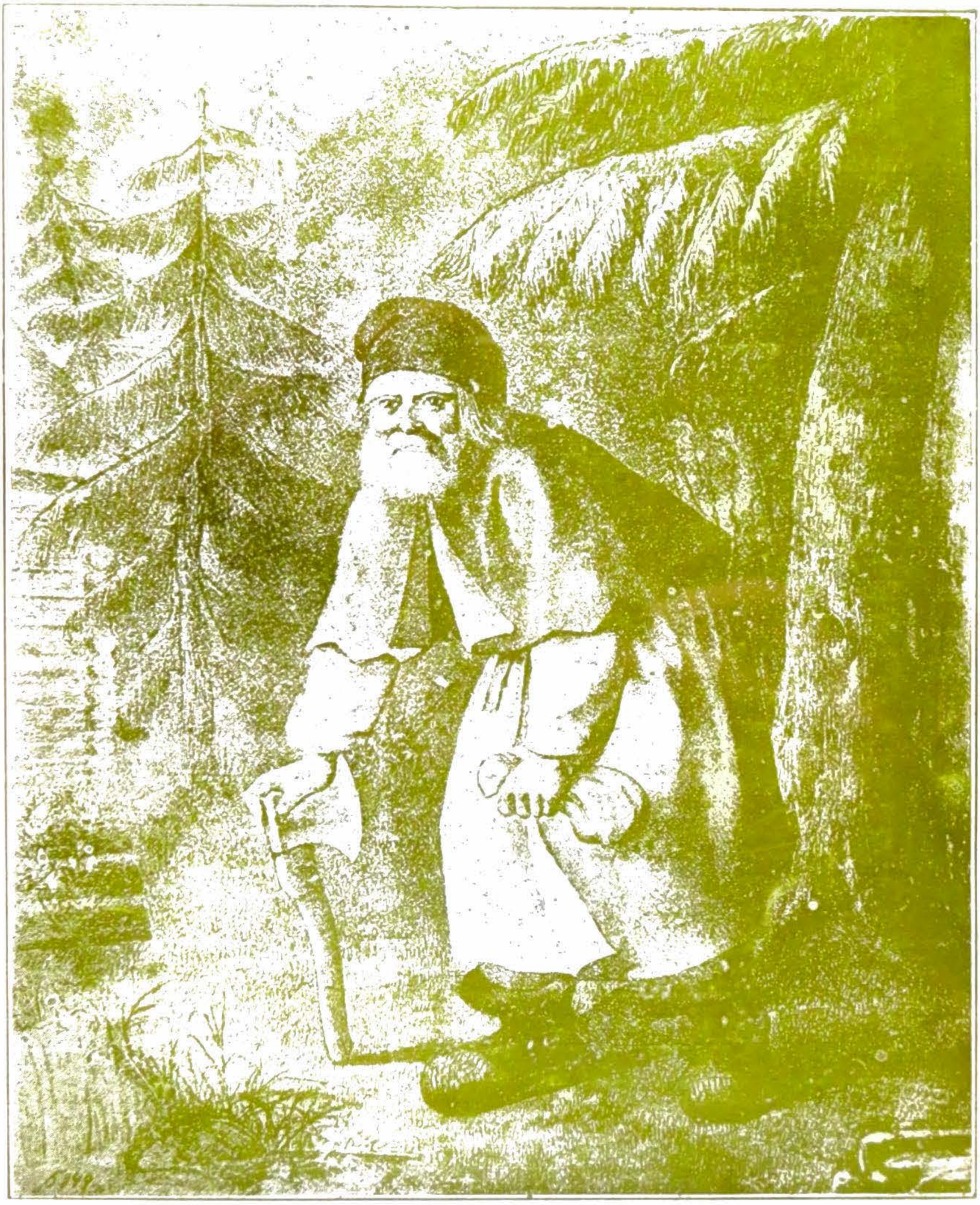
THE ORTHODOX WORD

No. 80

$1.25



LETTERS

In this part of *The Orthodox Word* we share with our readers a few of the letters we receive, revealing — if only to a small degree — some of the Christian concerns and experiences of the "little flock" which tries to be faithful to Christ in these latter times. To facilitate a free expression of views, most of the letters are published without full signatures, but the names of all writers are known to the editors. All comments of the editors are in italics.

THE ST. HERMAN CALENDAR

The St. Herman Calendar is quite indispensable for me. It serves many purposes: (1) when dealing with prospective converts as well as with some converts to Holy Orthodoxy the Calendar is a unique tool, because it briefly, yet without omitting anything of importance represents or describes the liturgical cycle of the Church's life; (2) it is a most useful reference source capable of giving basic information on specific points. For instance: each and every fast day is clearly indicated, and even the degree of fasting is also suggested; the commemorations of the Saints, and references are made to important events in the lives of some other pious and holy Christians. It is very important that commemorations are given not only of Saints commonly celebrated in the Russian Orthodox Church but in all other national Orthodox Churches also — the true unity of nations can only be found in Christ through His One Church.

Perhaps the "Rule of Fasting" should be reprinted each year for the benefit of those who do not have the 1977 Calendar.

And the articles by Blessed Archbishop John are always of immense value to every Orthodox Christian: they serve to edify and to instruct the faithful in matters of the Faith.

I use it personally on many occasions: to check the dates of feast days, or days of fast, commemoration of saints of the day. In fact I use this calendar more often than I do the general ones which are available in Russian.

The only thing that might be very helpful is a glossary of Saints in an alphabetical order with dates of commemoration listed next to them. This, however, would certainly entail a great amount of work and it might also not be feasible to include this in the Calendar, but rather to publish it as an addendum separately for those who may wish to acquire it.

S., Minnesota

Yesterday we received with joy the new Saint Herman Calendar. Everything that is published therein my wife and I read with great joy and with tears in our eyes. We thank our Lord and God, that such publications are still issued in these times of atheism, etc. We are astonished at how God, in His immeasurable love, continues to pour down grace upon grace without distinction upon good and evil men.

J.,Netherlands

(Continued on inside back cover.)

THE ORTHODOX WORD

For the Mission of True Orthodox Christianity

A Bimonthly Illustrated Periodical
of the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood

Established with the blessing of His Eminence the late *John (Maximovitch)*, Archbishop of Western America and San Francisco, Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia.

1978, vol. 14, no. 3 (80)
May-June

ISSN 0030-5839

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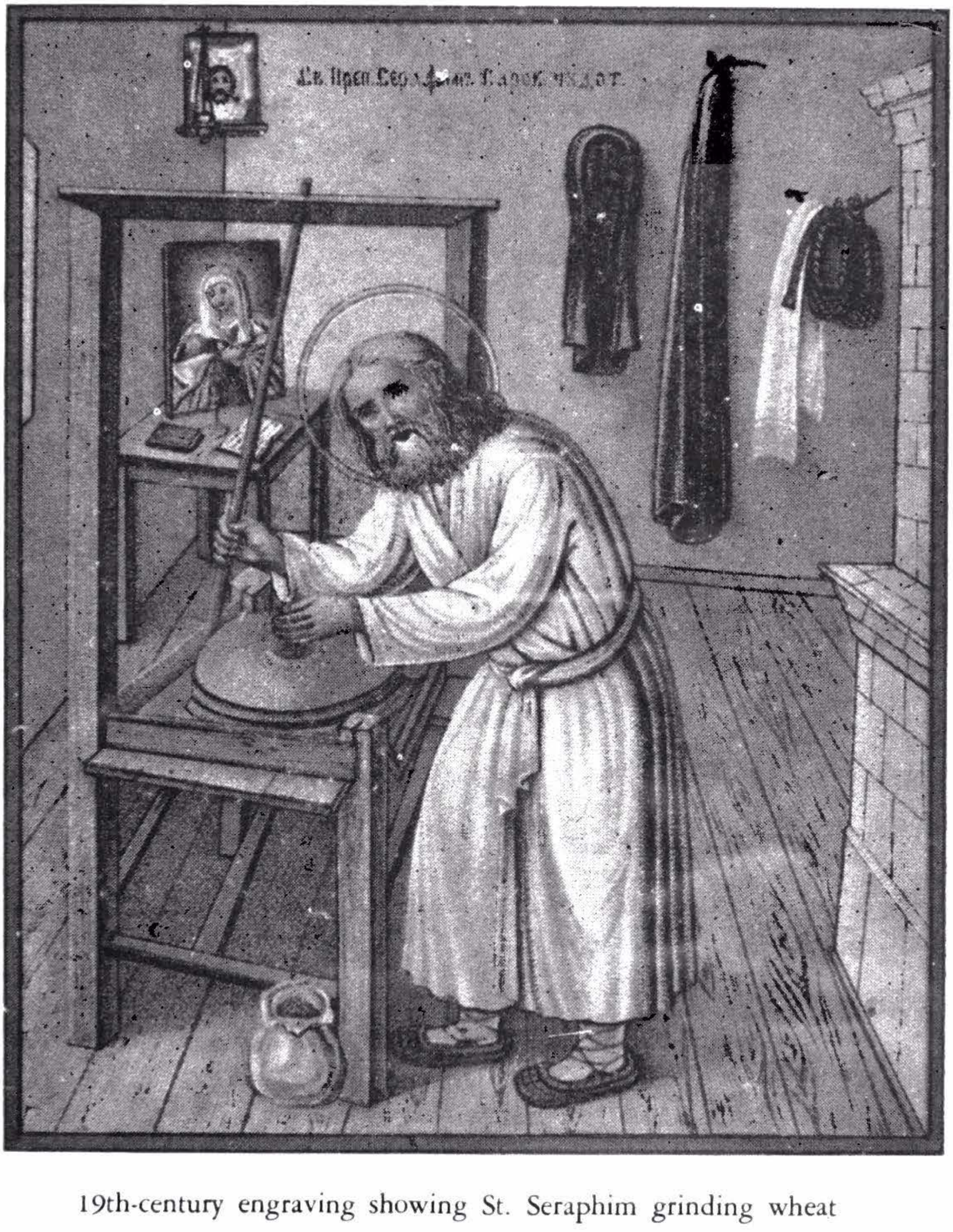
COVER: Engraving of St. Seraphim of Sarov apparently made during his lifetime and preserved by V. M. Kondakov, printed in *Russian Pilgrim,* 1903, no. 19.

THE ORTHODOX WORD, published bi-monthly by the Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood. Second-class postage paid at Platina, California. Yearly subscription $7, two years $12, three years $16. Office of Pulbication: Beegum Gorge Road, Platina, California All copies of all back issues and of individual articles are available from Xerox University Microfilms, 300 N. Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, MI., 48106. Copyright 1978 by the Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood. All inquiries should be directed to: **THE ORTHODOX WORD, PLATINA, CALIFORNIA, 96076, U.S.A.**



19th-century engraving showing St. Seraphim grinding wheat in the Diveyevo Convent mill, symbolically grinding our sins.

St. Seraphim of Sarov

From a Forthcoming Book of
The St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood

INTRODUCTION

THE BEST KNOWN of the Orthodox saints of modern times, St. Seraphim of Sarov, has much to teach the Orthodox Christians of these last times. Unfortunately, the striking nature of some of his spiritual experiences — which indeed stand in glaring contrast to the ordinary Christian experience of our days — has led some to miss the whole point of his teaching. Some are so dazzled by his visions and his all-embracing love that they try to follow him into the most exalted spheres of spiritual life without even the most elementary foundation in Orthodox knowledge and practice; others try artificially to set his "spirituality" against the "institutionalized Church," as if the two could be separated; still others would make him to be a "charismatic" figure who justifies the empty ecumenical "spirituality" of our own poor days; and a few imagine him to be a "guru" whose experience places him "beyond Christianity" and all religious traditions.

All such interpretations — which only bring spiritual harm and disaster to those who follow them — fail to understand St. Seraphim in the context of the religious tradition that produced him as one of its greatest flowerings: Orthodox Christianity in 18th-century Russia.

St. Seraphim (his worldly name was Prochor Moshnin) was born in 1759 in Kursk, in the heart of Holy Russia, to a pious merchant family. Raised in the fear of God and strict Orthodox life, he also knew very early the mercies of God at first hand; at the age of ten he was miraculously healed of a serious affliction by the Mother of God through Her Kursk Icon (which now is in America and continues to work miracles).

Once he learned to read, the boy Prochor immersed himself in the spiritual world of basic Christian literature: the Scriptures, Horologion (con-

taining the daily cycle of church services), the Psalter, the Lives of Saints; he spent all the time he could in church (where services would go on for many hours every day), and thought only of God and the spiritual world. A deep desire for spiritual things being thus kindled in him, he began to long to serve God in the monastic calling. At the age of 19, on a pilgrimage to the holy places of Kiev, he received the counsel of the holy recluse Dositheus (actually a woman) to "go to Sarov"; and after a short time this is what he did — spending the rest of his life in this remarkable monastery.

The Hermitage of Sarov had been founded early in the 18th century by the Elder John; the first settlers here were cave-dwellers, and the monastery always remained a place of severe ascetic life, at the same time handing down the ancient monastic tradition of the inward spiritual activity, the mental Prayer of Jesus. 18th-century Russia, although it was a time of monastic decline when compared with the flowering of the 14th to the 17th centuries, still had a number of Fathers (and Mothers) who kept alive the ancient tradition of Christian spirituality; the great monastic revival inspired by the great Elder Paisius Velichkovsky and his disciples at the end of the 18th century produced such remarkable spiritual fruits (notably the clairvoyant elders of Optina Monastery) precisely because the Russian soil had been prepared beforehand by an unbroken tradition of monastic struggle and spiritual life.

Blessed Paisius translated the Patristic texts on spiritual life, most notably the anthology known as the *Philokalia.* St. Seraphim made use of this book, which he probably received from Elder Nazarius of Sarov, one of the spiritual elders who prepared its publication; but the *Philokalia* was published in 1794, and St. Seraphim was spiritually formed before this, having read numerous other Patristic books that taught the same spiritual doctrine. There is nothing whatever that is "new" in the spiritual face of St. Seraphim; all is from the Holy Fathers, of whom he is a most faithful disciple, appearing in the latter times like some great desert Father of antiquity, like a new St. Macarius the Great.

In Sarov, St. Seraphim went through the standard monastic period of trial: he was placed in obedience to a spiritual father and was tested at various labors in the bread and prosphora bakeries, the carpenter shop, at chopping wood, as candle-lighter. Church services were long, as was his cell rule of prayer. In addition to the difficult monastic discipline, he was severely ill for three years — a trial he bore with humility and trust in God — until being healed by a vision of the Mother of God.

At the age of 27 St. Seraphim was tonsured a monk, and a few months later was ordained deacon. He served as deacon for nearly seven years, entering

ST. SERAPHIM OF SAROV
Rare 1841 engraving

deeply into the meaning of the Church's services. Often he saw angels, and once, on Great Thursday, as he stood before the Royal Doors in the middle of the Liturgy, he saw Christ Himself in the air surrounded by angels; unable to continue serving, he was conducted away and stood for several hours in ecstasy.

At the age of 34 he was ordained priest, and the next year his elder, Abbot Pachomius, on his death-bed entrusted to St. Seraphim the spiritual guidance of the sisters of the nearby Diveyevo Convent — a task he fulfilled so well that even today, fifty years after it was destroyed, it is still remembered as "St. Seraphim's Diveyevo." Just at this time also he received the blessing of the new Abbot to begin life as a hermit in the forest around Sarov. Here in a

small cabin he performed a long rule of prayer, labored much, and read the Scriptures and Holy Fathers. On Sundays he would come to the monastery to attend the Liturgy and receive Holy Communion, returning to the forest with his supply of bread for the week. For one period of three years he ate nothing but a certain herb called "sneet".

In 1804 the Saint was attacked by robbers and beaten almost to death. The Mother of God appeared to him in his affliction, together with the Apostles Peter and John the Theologian, saying of him: "This is one of our kind". After this he was bent over and walked always with a staff.

Now the Saint undertook yet greater struggles. Returning to his forest-desert, he undertook an exploit like that of the ancient pillar-saints of Syria: for a thousand days and nights he spent the better part of his time kneeling on a stone not far from his cell, constantly calling out to God with the prayer of the publican: "O God, be merciful to me a sinner." Strengthened by Divine grace for this humanly-impossible task, he entered into open battle with the demons at this time, like St. Anthony of old in the tombs; often he would see the demons, whom he would only describe as "foul".

In 1807, his last elder and instructor, Abbot Isaiah, died, and the Saint went into absolute seclusion, refusing to see anyone, and maintaining an absolute silence for three years. He no longer came to the monastery even for Divine services on Sunday, enduring with patience the great cross of total isolation and silence, by which he yet more crucified the passions and lusts of the old man.

Some of the inexperienced brethren of the monastery, however, became scandalized that the Saint did not seem to be receiving Holy Communion, and the monastery elders requested him to return (1810). In his monastery cell he remained in silence and seclusion, continuing just as in his forest cell to read the whole daily cycle of services, except for the Liturgy, saying the Prayer of Jesus, and reading especially the New Testament (which he went through once a week). During this time he was granted visions of heavenly mysteries, beholding the mansions of heaven with many of the saints.

After five years of this seclusion within the monastery, St. Seraphim, by a special revelation, opened the door of his cell for all who desired to see him, but still he continued his spiritual exercises without paying any attention to his visitors or answering their questions. After five more years the Mother of God again appeared to him, together with Sts. Onuphrius the Great and Peter of Mt. Athos, instructing him to end his silence and speak for the benefit of others. Now he greeted all who came with a prostration, a kiss, and the

Paschal greeting: "Christ is risen!" Everyone he called "my joy". In 1825 the Mother of God again appeared to him and blessed him to return to his forest cell. For the last eight years of his life St. Seraphim lived in the forest of Sarov and received the thousands of pilgrims who came to him to ask his prayers and spiritual counsel. The Saint now was manifest as a clairvoyant wonderworker, a grace-filled vessel of the action of the Holy Spirit. No one — monk, layman, or nun (whether of Diveyevo or of the several other convents which arose with his blessing) — left him without consolation and an answer to their spiritual need. He was in constant contact with the world above; twelve times in all, the Mother of God Herself appeared to him. He died kneeling before an icon of the Mother of God of "Tender Feeling" on January 2, 1833. Having led a heavenly life on earth, like the great desert saints of antiquity, even in these latter times of spiritual desolation, St. Seraphim is an instructor and an inspirer of the true Christian life. His *Spiritual Instructions* — like his celebrated *Conversation* with Motovilov on the Acquisition of the Holy Spirit — contain no new teaching, but simply repeat in modern times the age-old Christian teaching of the great Fathers whom he constantly cites: Sts. Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, John Chrysostom, Macarius the Great, Dionysius the Areopagite, Ambose of Milan, Isaac the Syrian, Simeon the New Theologian, the Fathers of the *Philokalia.* These, with the Holy Scriptures, the Lives of Saints, and the Church services — all in the context of the living Sarov tradition of spiritual life — are his sources, and he is a faithful transmitter of their teaching: fear of God, heedfulness to oneself, not trusting the impulses of one's own heart but becoming so immersed in God's word that one learns to "swim in the law of the Lord"; working out one's salvation with patience, humility, repentance, forgiveness; acquiring the Spirit of peace, the Holy Spirit, which is the end of all our spiritual labors; placing first God and His love, which kindles our cold hearts and inspires us to follow Him, to know and to love him.

This teaching is not complex; but in our own days, when the love of many has grown cold and the salt is going out of Christianity, it is almost impossible to follow. Only with great humility on our part — which we can learn from the profound humility of "poor Seraphim," as he called himself — can we hope to receive and apply this teaching of the true Christian spiritual life to our own poor Christian lives.

By the prayers of our holy Father Seraphim, may we understand his words and practice them, according to our strength, for the salvation of our souls!

THE BLESSED STATE

HOMILY 2

By Saint Symeon the New Theologian

1. THAT HUMAN NATURE THROUGH THE INCARNATION OF THE SON, GOD THE WORD, COMES AGAIN INTO THE BLESSED STATE, THAT IS, INTO THE GOOD AND DIVINE CONDITION IN WHICH IT WAS UNTIL THE TRANSGRESSION OF ADAM.

INASMUCH AS human nature lost its blessed state through the transgression of Adam, it is essential for us to know what Adam was before the loss of the blessed state, and in what consisted this blessed state, or that good and divine condition which man had before the transgression. The Holy Fathers tell us that God became man in order that through His becoming man He might again raise up human nature into the blessed state, Therefore, we must know in what way it is that man, through the Economy of Christ's Incarnation, may again come into the blessed state.

God, in the beginning when He created man, created Him holy, passionless, and sinless, in His own image and likeness. And man was then precisely like God Who created him; for the holy, sinless and passionless God creates also His creatures holy, passionless and sinless. But inasmuch as unalterability and unchangingness are characteristic of the Unoriginate and Uncreated Divinity alone, therefore the created man naturally was alterable and changeable, although he had the means and the possibility, with the help of God, not to be subject to alteration and change.

Thus man was holy, and as holy he had no need of any law; for the righteous need no law. What need is there of the law for one who is holy, passioless, and pure? The law commands to do good and not to do evil. But the Scripture says that *God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was*

very good (Genesis 1:31). And so, inasmuch as everything was good, what need was there for man to learn what was good **and** what was bad? Since there was nothing except what was very good, this divine man had no need of the law.

2. LIKEWISE OF THE NATURAL LAW, WRITTEN AND SPIRITUAL.

However, inasmuch as it was in his power to eat of every tree of Paradise and from the very Tree of Life itself, there was given to him a commandment not to eat from one tree only, so that he might know that he was alterable and changeable, and might beware, and might always remain in that good and divine condition. God, by those words which He said to him in giving the commandment that if he should eat he would die, gave him to understand that he was alterable and changeable.

Thus, at that time, in Paradise, no law was necessary, either written or spiritual. But after man had eaten of that forbidden tree and had died a bitter death, that is, had fallen away from God and become subject to corruption — then, so that he might not fall completely away from every good (since evil had spread mightily among the human race and was tyrannizing over it by force, by reason of the disastrous enfeeblement to which it had become subject as a result of corruption) there was given him a law in order that it might indicate what was good and what bad. For man had become blind; he had gone out of his mind and become senseless; and therefore he also had need of instruction, as is written in the Psalms, *Unveil mine eyes, and I shall perceive wondrous things out of Thy law* (Ps. 118:73). Do you see to what a pitiful condition man had come, and how, therefore, he had need of the written law? For after he had fallen he could no longer know even this world, unless he be enlighted from above by God with knowledge of it.

Afterwards, however, when Christ came and so intimately joined in himself the Divinity with humanity that these two which had been extremely separated, that is, the Divinity and humanity, became one Person, although they remained unfused and unmingled — from that time man became, as it were, a light, through the union with that first and unsetting Light of God, and he has no more need of any written law, because the divine grace of Jesus Christ remaining with him and in him brings forth as fruit for him the blessed state, that is, love, joy, peace, longsuffering, goodness, mercifulness, faith, meekness, and temperance. This is why the Apostle Paul, in enumerating such fruits of the Holy Spirit says at the end, *against such there is no law* (Gal. 5:22-23); because for the righteuos no law is needed. And he who does not yet have such fruits of the Holy Spirit is not of Christ, as the Apostle says; *If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His* (Rom. 8:9). Such a one must

struggle and strive so as to become of Christ, lest he believe in Christ in vain, in which case Christ is of no benefit to him whatever. All his striving and all his struggle must be directed to acquiring the Spirit of Christ, and in this way to bring forth the fruits of the Holy Spirit: for in this consists the spiritual law and the blessed state.

3. YET MORE CONCERNING THE WAY IN WHICH ONE MAY COME INTO THE BLESSED STATE.

But if human nature, through the Incarnation of Christ, comes again into the blessed state, as it was in the beginning, and if there is no other means and no other power or wisdom, or labor and struggle whereby human nature might again come into the blessed state and become as it was created in the beginning, but it is solely in the hand of God Who gave it its existence; and if there is no other means whatsoever to give him the blessed state, — then what need is there vainly to labor, struggling for this by one's own ascetic exploits alone, by readings, sufferings of evil, exhausting oneself with thirst, hunger and vigils? And if such and so great sufferings of evil are in vain and profitless for one who does not know this great mystery (of salvation), then upon every Christian lies the duty of learning it and knowing it, so as not to labor in vain in those sufferings of evil, and not to allow his soul to perish even with them — something more disastrous than any other disaster. For all such and so great sufferings of evil should be undertaken not so as to *come* into the blessed state, but in order to *preserve* the blessed state which we have received before through Holy Baptism, since this treasure is difficult to preserve and we must pay good heed that we preserve it, as the Holy Fathers have said. And in the future life a Christian will not be tested as to whether he renounced the world, whether he fasted, whether he performed vigils, whether he prayed whether he wept, or performed any other such good deeds in the present life; but he will be carefully tested as to whether he has some kind of likeness to Christ, as a son to his father, as the Apostle Paul also says: *My little children, over whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you* (Gal. 4:19). For those who have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ (Gal. 3:27).

4. WHAT KIND OF DEEDS WE MAY DO IN ORDER TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

Those who keep the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven, if they do not see in a Christian the likeness of Christ, as a son to his father, will by no means open them to him and allow him to enter. For just as those who are like the

old Adam, who transgressed the commandment of God, remain outside the Kingdom of Heaven, despite the fact that they are not by any means guilty of the fact that they are like their forefather Adam, so also Christians, like the New Adam, their father Christ, enter into the Kingdom of Heaven despite the fact that their likeness to Christ is not their own doing, since this is accomplished by means of the faith which they receive in Christ.

The likeness of Christ consists in truth, meekness, righteousness, and together with them humility and love of mankind. The truth is beheld in all one's words, and meekness in all words spoken by others to oneself; because one who is meek, whether he is surrounded by praises or reproaches, preserves himself passionless and is neither exalted by praises nor embittered by reproaches. Righteousness is beheld in all deeds; for just as we define the weight of things by means of scales, and just as we find out the quality of gold through polishing it against a stone, so also we do not depart in any undertaking from the boundaries of righteousness if in it we keep in mind those measures (means of measurement or scales) which our Lord has given to us — the commandments.

Humility is as it were a treasure that cannot be stolen, which is formed in the mind, that bears the conviction that only by the power of grace received from Christ are there any good qualities to be shown in oneself — that is, truth, meekness, and righteousness. Love of mankind is a likeness of God, since it does good to all men, both the pious and impious, both good and evil, both those known and those unknown, just as God also does good to all, shines the sun upon the righteous and the unrighteous, and sends rain upon the evil and upon the good.

And so, those who have received this from Christ have from Him a likenss to Him, as a son has from a father the likeness to the father, because there is no son who is not of the nature of his father. It is for this that God became man, and through this union of the Divinity with human nature the Divinity reigns over human nature, as has been written: *Bend thy bow, and proceed prosperously, and be king, because of truth and meekness and righteousness* (Ps. 44:5).

Thus, one over whom Christ has not come to be king, through those virtues of which we have spoken, is not like Christ as to a father, and is unworthy to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. In truth so it is. Therefore, all other struggles are in vain if they are not for the sake (of these virtues). Let us also, brethren, strive to become like to Christ by means of these virtues, that we may be vouchsafed His Kingdom. To Him may there be glory and dominion unto the ages. Amen.

Orthodox Funds

OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OUTSIDE OF RUSSIA

Contributions are needed to increase the help these organizations, founded in the name of Orthodox saints and righteous ones, are giving to the poor, the sick, and those in need. For a certain monthly or yearly contribution, one can become a "member" of most of these funds.

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which receives pilgrims to the relics of St. Nicholas.)

The Epistle of Bishop Alexis Bui of Voronezh

To the Orthodox Clergy and Laymen
of the Diocese of Voronezh

Greater joy have I none than this, to hear my children walking in the truth (III John 1:4).

STANDING ON GUARD for Orthodoxy and vigilantly following all manifestations of church life not only in the diocese entrusted to our humility, but in general in the Whole Patriarchate, to our great distress we have discovered in the latest actions of Metropolitan Sergius of Nizhegorod, who has returned to his duties as Substitute of the Patriarchal Locum Tenens, a rapid descent towards renovationism, an exceeding of the rights and authority reserved for him, and a violation of the holy canons (resolution of questions of principle independently, transfer and removal of bishops without trial or investigation, etc.; see Canonical Epistle of St. Cyril, Apostolic Canon 34).

By his actions against the spirit of Orthodoxy, Metropolitan Sergius has torn himself away from unity with the Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church and has forfeited the right of presidency in the Russian Church.

The Orthodox hierarchs and pastors have attempted in every way to influence Metropolitan Sergius and return him to the straight and true path, but they have not succeeded.

Being zealous for the glory of God and desiring to place a limit to the further infringement by Metropolitan Sergius of the wholeness and inviolability of the Holy Canons and decrees of ecclesiastical order, and to preserve unimpaired canonical communion with their lawful head, the Most Reverend Metropolitan Peter of Krutitsa, Patriarchal Locum Tenens, — the Most Reverend Metropolitan Joseph and the Orthodox archpastors one in mind with him have condemned the actions of Sergius and deprived him of communion with themselves.

Being by God's will and with the blessing of the Substitute of the Patriarchal Locum Tenens, Archbishop Seraphim of Uglich, invested on February 16/29, 1927, with the high authority of being the guardian of the Church of Voronezh, remaining at the same time also Bishop of the Kozlov disrict, and entirely sharing the opinion and outlook of the faithful Orthodox hierarchs and their flock, from this time forth I separate myself from Metropolitan Sergius, his uncanonical Synod and their actions, preserving canonical succession through the Patriarchal Locum Tenens, Metropolitan Peter of Krutitsa.

I have chosen the Most Reverend Joseph (Metropolitan of Petrograd), assigned by the Patriarchal Locum Tenens Metropolitan Peter of Krutitsa, on December 6, 1925, as third candidate to the post of Substitute of the Patriarchal Locum Tenens, as my highest spiritual guide.

I entreat the Lord "that He preserve our land in peace," that He confirm and keep His Holy Church from unbelief, heresies, and schism, and grant us zeal and courage to walk without reproach in His statutes."

Administering the Diocese of Voronezh,
Bishop Alexis of Kozlov

(Seal) January 9/22, 1928
St. Philip,
Metropolitan of Moscow
Voronezh.

The Spiritual Closeness of Saints

My first meeting with Vladika John was evoked by great need — a serious illness. In 1953, in New York City, I underwent an unsuccessful operation on my left eye, which had a cataract. For several months I was threatened by blindness. Finally I was again placed in the hospital and given so-called "shock" treatment, as a result of which I almost died. But after this "shock" I could open the eye. But here a new misfortune appeared: glaucoma . . . Again I was given an operation to remove the liquid which had accumulated inside the eye, and I was told that such an operation would have to be repeated every year.

It should be added that both in the beginning, when the inflammation started, and later with the increase of pressure inside the eye, this affliction was accompanied by intolerable pains which deprived me of sleep and the ability to work. And all this time our economic condition was extremely sad.

In such circumstances, hearing of the arrival from Europe of Archbishop John, we went to the Synodal church where he was serving. After the service my husband led me up to Vladika. I briefly told him about my misfortune and asked his holy prayers. To my great astonishment Vladika, who did not know me in the least, when blessing me called my by name. After the blessing which I received from Vladika I went to the hospital for the operation completely at peace. And by God's mercy, by the prayers of the holy Vladika, this was the last operation I had: I have not needed them for over 17 years now.

After this we included Vladika John in the number of those clergymen and laymen for whose health we prayed when performing our daily rule of prayer.

However, after the passage of a certain time, in connection with the extreme exhaustion of my husband, we had to think of abbreviating our rule of prayer. The thought came to lessen the number of persons whom we commemorated, both living and dead. The enemy instilled in me the thought of saying to my husband: "Vladika John is a holy man and does not need our unworthy prayers."

In the evening we did not commemorate Vladika John, as also certain other persons whom we had commemorated previously.

After praying I lay down to sleep. I had hardly succeeded in dozing off when suddenly, either in sleep or in actual fact, I saw Vladika John (who at that time was in Europe), in his black mantle with a cross in his right hand. I went up to him with joy to receive his blessing, bu he said to me: "No, you do not need me now and I will not bless you. When you needed me I blessed you, and if you will need me sometime in the future, then come to me for blessing." And with these words Vladika left without blessing me.

Of course I could no longer go to sleep and all the time I thought of my unworthiness, the wondrous deeds of God and of the teaching of the Apostle Paul that we should pray for all instructors and for each other.

In the morning with fear I related to my husband concerning my dream or vision, and from that time we have not ceased, and will not cease to commemorate Vladika John, as before among the living and now for his repose, entreating the Lord that He, by the prayers of our holy Vladika, might save and have mercy upon us sinners.

Some time after this incident we heard that Vladika John had arrived and would serve at the Church of the Holy Archangel Michael in Brooklyn. I went there with my husband, I was afraid to go up to Vladika to receive his blessing. However, Vladika looked at me kindly and blessed me with joy.

O Holy Vladika, pray for us sinners before the Throne of the Almighty, that He might not leave us, but might strenghen us in faith and patience to bear our crosses to the end of our days, and to oppose with sobriety the corrupting spirit of apostasy which is so widely spread by the predecessors of Antichrist in our days.

Maria Mostiko
Forefeast of Transfiguration
5 (18) August, 1973

Translated from the *Chronicle of the Veneration of Archbishop John Maximovitch*, St. Herman Brotherhood, 1976, pp. 126-128.

THE SOUL AFTER DEATH

CONTEMPORARY "AFTER-DEATH" EXPERIENCES IN THE LIGHT OF ORTHODOX TEACHING ON THE AFTERLIFE

4. The Vision of "Heaven"

In *Life After Life* Dr. Moody remarks that the people he has interviewed do not seem to have experienced anything like "the mythological picture of what lies hereafter" and even tend to disbelieve in the usual view of heaven and hell and the whole "reward-punishment model of the afterlife" (p. 70).

In *Reflections on Life After Life,* however, he states that his later interviews have indeed revealed widespread after-death experiences of "other realms of being which might well be termed 'heavenly' ". (p. 15). One man found himself in "a countryside with streams, grass, and trees, mountains" (p. 16); one woman was in a similar "beautiful place," and "off in the distance . . . I could see a city. There were buildings — separate buildings. They were gleaming, bright. People were happy in there. There was sparkling water, fountains . . . a city of light I guess would be the way to say it" (p. 17).

In actual fact, as some of the other new books reveal, this experience is a rather common one. The Protestant authors mentioned above believe that this experience (at least when its imagery is distinctively Biblical) is a *Christian* one and is to be sharply distinguished from most of the other "after-death" experiences, which they believe to be demonic deceptions. "Unbelievers seem to experience false doctrine of a kind specifically attributed to Satan in the Bible; believers experience doctrinally accurate events, which might come right out of the scriptures" (Levitt and Weldon, *Is There Life*

After Death?," p. 116). Is this actually true, or are the experiences of believers and unbelievers really much closer than these authors imagine?

The experience which these authors cite as an authentic "Christian" one is that of Betty Malz, who has published a book describing her 28-minute "out-of-the-body" experience while being "clinically dead". After death she found herself immediately "walking up a beautiful green hill . . . I was walking on grass, the most vivid shade of green I have ever seen." She was accompanied by another walking figure, "a tall, masculine-looking figure in a robe. I wondered if he were an angel . . . As we walked together I saw no sun — but light was everywhere. Off to the left there were multi-colored flowers blooming. Also trees, shrubs . . . We came upon a magnificent silver structure. It was like a palace except there were no towers. As we walked toward it, I heard voices. They were melodious, harmonious, blending in chorus and I heard the word, 'Jesus' . . . The angel stepped forward and put the palm of his hand upon a gate which I had not noticed before. About twelve feet high, the gate was a solid sheet of pearl." When the gate opened, "inside I saw what appeared to be a street of golden color with an overlay of glass or water. The yellow light that appeared was dazzling. There is no way to describe it. I saw no figure, yet I was conscious of a Person. Suddenly I knew that the light was Jesus." On being invited to enter the gate, she remembered her father who was praying for her, the gates closed, and she returned down the hill, noticing the sun rising above the jeweled wall — which soon was turned into sunrise over the city of Terre Haute, where she returned to her body in the hospital in what was commonly acknowledged as a miracle (Betty Malz, *My Glimpse of Eternity,* Chosen Books, Waco, Texas, pp. 84-89).

Is this experience really different in kind from most of those that Dr. Moody relates? Is this actually a Christian vision of heaven? (Mrs. Malz is Protestant in belief, and her faith was strengthened by this experience.) The Orthodox Christian reader is not, of course, as convinced of this as are the Protestant authors quoted above. Quite apart from whatever knowledge we may have of how the soul approaches

heaven after death, and what it goes through to get there (these will be discussed later) — this experience does not really seem to us to be so very different from the "secular" after-death experiences now being written about. Apart from the "Christian" coloration naturally given to this experience by a believing Protestant (the angel, the hymn, the presence of Jesus), there are several elements in common with the "secular" experiences: the feeling of comfort and peace (which she describes as being in sharp contrast to her months of painful illness), the being of light" (which others also identify as "Jesus"), the approach to some kind of different realm which lies beyond some kind of "border". And it is a little strange that she should see the this-worldly sun rise over the jewelled walls, if this is really heaven . . . How are we to interpret this experience?

In some of the other new books there are a number of similar experiences, a brief examination of which will give us a much better idea of what is involved.

One book has recently been compiled of "Christian" (mostly Protestant) dying and "after-death" experiences (John Myers, *Voices from the Edge of Eternity,* Spire Books, Old Tappan, N.J., 1973). In one experience related in this book, a woman "died", was freed from her body and came to a place of great light looking through a "window of heaven." "What I saw there made all earthly joys pale into insignificance. I longed to join the merry throng of children singing and frolicking in the apple orchard . . . There were both fragrant blossoms and ripe red fruits on the trees. As I sat there drinking in the beauty, gradually I became aware of a Presence; a Presence of joy, harmony and compassion. My heart yearned to become a part of this beauty." After she returned to her body, after being "dead" for fifteen mintues, "the rest of that day and the next, that other world was far more real to me than the one to which I had returned" (pp. 228-231, reprinted from *Guideposts Magazine,* 1963). This experience produced a seeming "spiritual" joy comparable to that of Mrs. Malz, and likewise gave a new religious dimension to the person's life after the experience; but the image of "heaven" that was seen was quite different.

A vivid "after death" experience was had by a Virginia physician, Dr. George C. Ritchie, Jr. A brief account of it was published in *Guideposts Magazine* in 1963, and a longer version is soon to be published in book form by Chosen Books with the title *Return from Tomorrow*. In this account, after a long adventure of being separated from his body (which was pronounced dead), the young George Ritchie returned to the small room where his body lay, and only then did he realize that he was "dead", whereupon a great light filled the room, which he felt to be Christ, "a presence so comforting, so joyous and all-satisfying, that I wanted to lose myself forever in the wonder of it." After seeing flashbacks of his life, in answer to the question "What did you do with your time on earth?" he saw three visions. The first two seemed to be of "a very different world occupying the same space" as this earth, but still with many earthly images (streets and countrysides, universities, libraries, laboratories). "Of the final world I had only a glimpse. Now we no longer seemed to be on earth, but immensely far away, out of all relation to it. And there, still at a great distance, I saw a city — but a city, if such a thing is conceivable, constructed out of light . . . in which the walls, houses, streets, seemed to give off light, while moving among them were beings as blindingly bright as the One who stood beside me. This was only a moment's vision, for the next instant the walls of the little room closed around me, the dazzling light faded, and a strange sleep stole over me." Before this, he had not read anything about life after death; after the experience, he became very active in Protestant church work *(Voices from the Edge of Eternity,* pp. 56-61).

This striking experience occurred in 1943, and as it turns out, such experiences are not at all unique to the "resuscitation" experiences of the past few years. The Protestant minister Norman Vincent Peale records some similar experiences and has this comment: "Hallucination, a dream, a vision — I do not believe so. I have spent too many years talking to people who have come to the edge of 'something' and had a look across, who unanimously have reported beauty, light, and peace, to have any doubt in my own mind" (Norman Vincent Peale, *The Power of Positive Thinking,* Prentice-Hall, Inc.,

New York, 1953, p. 256). *Voices from the Edge of Eternity* takes numerous examples from three 19th-century anthologies of death-bed visions and near-death experiences; although none of these examples is as detailed as some of the more recent testimonies, they offer abundant proof that the vision of other-worldly apparitions and scenes has been a fairly common occurrence to the dying. In these experiences, those who feel themselves to be Christians and prepared for death have feelings of peace, joy, light, angels, heaven, while unbelievers (in the more fundamentalistic America of the 19th century!) often see demons and hell.

Having established the *fact* of these visions, we must now ask the question: what is their nature? Is the vision of heaven really so common among those who, while dying as Christians in the best way they know, are still outside the Church of Christ, the Orthodox Church?

In judging the nature and value of such experiences, we shall begin by repeating our approach to the question of the "meeting with others." Let us examine the dying experiences of *non-Christians* in order to see if they are markedly different from those of professed Christians. If non-Christians also commonly see "heaven" while dying or after "death," then we will have to understand this experience as something natural that may occur to anyone, and not as something specifically Christian. The book of Drs. Osis and Haraldsson has abundant evidence on this point.

These researchers report some 75 cases of "visions of another world" among dying patients. Some people describe unbelievably beautiful meadows and gardens; others see gates opening up to a beautiful counrtyside or city; many hear other-worldly music. Often a rather worldly imagery is mixed in, as with the American woman who went to a beautiful garden in a taxi, or the Indian woman who rode a cow to her "heaven" (*At the Hour of Death,* p. 163), or the New Yorker who entered a lush green field, his soul full of "love and happiness — and could see the buildings of Manhattan and an amusement park in the distance (David Wheeler, *Journey to the Other Side,* pp. 100-105).

Significantly, Hindus see "heaven" as often as Christians in the Osis-Haraldsson study, and while the latter often see

"Jesus" and "angels," the former just as often see Hindu temples and gods (p. 177). Even more significantly, the depth of the patients' commitment to or involvement in religion seems to have no effect whatever on their ability to see other-worldly visions; "deeply involved patients saw gardens, gates, and heaven no more often than those of lesser or no involvement" (p. 173). Indeed, one member of the Indian Communist Party, an atheist and materialist, was transported while dying to "a beautiful place, not of this earth . . . He heard music and also some singing in the background. When he recognized that he was alive, he was sorry that he had to leave this beautiful place" (p. 179). One person attempted suicide, and while dying reported "I am in heaven. There are so many houses around me, so many streets with big trees bearing sweet fruit and small birds singing in the trees" (p. 178). Most of those who have such experiences feel a great joy, peace, serenity, and acceptance of death; few wish to come back to this life (p. 182).

Thus, it is clear that we must be extremely cautious in interpreting the "visions of heaven" that are seen by dying and "dead" people. As above, when discussing the "meeting with others" in chapter 2, so now also we must clearly distinguish between genuine, grace-given visions of the other world, and a merely natural experience which, even though it may be outside the normal limits of human experience, is not in the least spiritual and tells us nothing about the actual reality of either the heaven or the hell of authentic Christian teaching.

The most important part of our investigation of "after-death" and dying experiences now lies before us: the measuring and judging of them by the yardstick of the authentic Christian teaching and experience of life after death, and a definition of their meaning and their significance for our times. It is already possible here, however, to give a preliminary evaluation of the "heaven" experience so commonly reported today: most, perhaps indeed all, of these experiences have little in common with the Christian vision of heaven. These visions are not spiritual, but *worldly*. They are so quick, so easily attained, so common, so earthly in their imagery, that there can be no serious comparison of them with the true

Christian visions of heaven in the past (some of which will be described below). Even the most "spiritual" thing about some of them — the feeling of the "presence" of Christ — persuades one more of the spiritual immaturity of those who experience it than of anything else. Rather than producing the profound awe, fear of God, and repentance which the authentic experience of God's presence has evoked in Christian saints (of which St. Paul's experience on the road to Damascus may be taken as a model — Acts 9:3-9), the present-day experiences produce something much more akin to the "comfort" and "peace" of the modern spiritistic and pentecostal movements.

Nevertheless, it cannot be doubted that these experiences are extraordinary; many of them cannot be reduced to mere hallucinations, and they seem to occur outside the limits of earthly life as generally understood, in a realm somewhere between life and death, as it were.

What is this realm? This is the question to which we now turn. In order to answer it, we shall look first of all to authentic Christian testimony, and then — as Dr. Moody and many other writers on this subject are doing — to the writings of modern occultists and others who claim to have travelled in this realm. This latter source, if properly understood, provides a surprising corroboration of Christian truth.

To begin with, then, let us ask the question: what is the realm, in Christian teaching, which the soul first enters after death?

To be continued.

The Place of BLESSED AUGUSTINE in the Orthodox Church

(Continued)

THE NINTH CENTURY: ST. PHOTIUS THE GREAT

THE THEOLOGY of Blessed Augustine (but no longer his theology of grace) became controversial in the East for the first time late in the ninth century in connection with the famous argument over the *Filioque* (the teaching that the Holy Spirit proceeds "also from the Son" and not from the Father alone, as the East has always taught). This marked the first time that any part of Augustine's theology had been subjected to careful examination by a Greek Father (St. Photius) in the East; the Fathers of Gaul who opposed him on grace, although they taught in the Eastern spirit, all lived in the West and wrote in Latin.

The 9th-century *Filioque* controversy is a vast subject about which an informative book has recently been published.* Here we shall only be concerned with the attitude of St. Photius to Blessed Augustine. This attitude is basically the same as that of the 5th-century Fathers of Gaul, but St. Photius gives a more detailed explanation of what the Orthodox view is with regard to a great and holy Father who has erred.

In one work, his "Letter to the Patriarch of Aquileia" (who was one of the leading apologists for the *Filioque* in the West under Charlemagne), St. Photius answers several objections. To the statement: "The great Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome and certain others have written that the Holy Spirit Proceeds also from the Son," St. Photius replies: "If ten or even twenty Fathers have said this, 600 and a numerous multitude have not said it. Who is it that offends the Fathers? Is it not those who, enclosing the whole piety of those few Fathers in a few words and placing them in contradiction to councils, prefer them to the numberless rank (of other Fathers)? Or is it those who choose as their defenders the many Fathers? Who offends holy Augustine, Jerome and Ambrose? Is it not he who forces them to contradict the common Master and Teacher, or is it he who, doing nothing of the sort, desires that all should follow the decree of the common Master?"

Then St. Photius presents an objection typical of the all-too-often narrowly-logical Latin mentality: "If they taught well, then everyone who con-

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* Richard Haugh, *Photius and the Carolingians,* Nordland, Belmont, Mass., 1975.

siders them as Fathers should accept their idea; but if they have not spoken piously, they should be cast out together with the heretics." The answer of St. Photius to this rationalistic view is a model of the depth, sensitivity, and compassion with which true Orthodoxy looks on those who have erred in good faith: "Have there not been complicated conditions which have forced many Fathers in part to express themselves imprecisely, in part to speak with adaptation to circumstances under the attacks of enemies, and at times out of human ignorance to which they also were subject? . . . If some have spoken imprecisely, or for some reason not known to us, even deviated from the right path, but no question was put to them nor did anyone challenge them to learn the truth — we admit them to the list of Fathers, just as if they had not said it, because of their righteousness of life and distinguished virtue and their faith, faultless in other respects. We do not, however, follow their teaching in which they stray from the path of truth . . . We, though, who know that some of our Holy Fathers and teachers strayed from the faith of true dogmas, do not take as doctrine those areas in which they strayed, but we embrace the men. So also in the case of any who are charged with teaching that the Spirit proceeds from the Son, we do not admit what is opposed to the word of the Lord, but we do not cast them out from the rank of the Fathers."*

In his later treatise on the subject of the Procession of the Holy Spirit, the *Mystagogia,* St. Photius speaks in a similar vein regarding Augustine and others who have erred regarding the *Filioque,* and again defends Augustine against those who would falsely make him stand against the Church's tradition, urging the Latins to cover the mistake of their Fathers "using silence and gratitude" (*Photius and the Carolingians,* pp. 151-3).

Blessed Augustine's teaching on the Holy Trinity, like his teaching on grace, missed the mark not so much because it was in error on any specific point; if he had known the full Eastern teaching on the Holy Trinity he probably would not have taught that the Spirit proceeds "also from the Son." He rather approached the whole dogma from a different — a "psychological" — viewpoint that was not as adequate as the Eastern approach in expressing the truth of our knowledge of God; here, as on grace and other doctrines also, the narrower Latin approach is not so much "wrong" as "limited." Several centuries later the great Eastern Father, St. Gregory Palamas, was able to excuse some of the Latin formulations of the Procession of the Holy Spirit (as long as it was not a matter of the Procession of the *Hypostasis* of the Holy Spirit), adding: "We must not behave in unseemly fashion, vainly quarreling about words."**

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* *Photius and the Carolingians,* pp. 136-7; some passages added from the Russian translation in Archbishop Philaret of Chernigov, op. cit., vol. 3, pp. 254-5.

** See Rev. John Meyendorf, *A Study of Gregory Palamas,* The Faith Press, London, 1964, pp. 231-2.

But even those who taught incorrectly about the Procession of the *Hypostasis* of the Holy Spirit (as St. Photius believed Blessed Augustine had taught), if they taught in this way before the issue was thoroughly discussed in the Church and the Orthodox doctrine was clearly presented to them, are to be treated with leniency and "not cast out from the rank of the Fathers."

Blessed Augustine himself, we should add, was fully deserving of the loving condescension which St. Photius showed in regard to his error. In the conclusion of his book *On the Trinity* he wrote: "O Lord the One God, God the Trinity, whatever I have said in these books that is of Thine, may they acknowledge who are Thine; if anything of my own, may it be pardoned both by Thee and by those who are Thine."

In the 9th century, then, when another serious error of Blessed Augustine was exposed and became a matter of controversy, the Orthodox East continued to regard him as a Saint and a Father.

LATER CENTURIES: ST. MARK OF EPHESUS

IN THE FIFTEENTH century, at the "Union" Council of Florence, a situation similar to that of St. Photius' time presented itself: the Latins cited Augustine as authority (sometimes incorrectly) for their teaching on doctrines as various as the *Filioque* and purgatory, and a great theologian of the East answered them.

In their first statement to the Greeks in support of the cleansing fire of purgatory, the Latins brought forward the text of the letter of Emperor St. Justinian to the fathers of the Fifth Ecumenical Council (already quoted above) in order to establish the ecumenical authority in the Church of Blessed Augustine and other Western Fathers. To this St. Mark answered (in his "First Homily on Purgatorial Fire," ch. 7): "First of all you have cited certain words of the Fifth Ecumenical Council which define that in everything one should follow those Fathers whose utterances you intend to quote, and completely accept what they have said; in this number are Augustine and Ambrose who, supposedly, teach more distinctly than others about this cleansing fire. But these words are not known to us, for we do not have the book of Acts of that Council, which is why we request you to present it if you have it written in Greek. For we are quite astonished that in this text Theophilus also is numbered with the other Teachers; he is known everywhere not for any kind of writing, but for an evil renown because of his madness against Chrysostom."**

** Archimandrite Amvrossy Pogodin, *Saint Mark of Ephesus and the Union of Florence,* in Russian, Jordanville, N.Y., 1963, pp. 65-6. Further references here are to this book, which contains full Russian translations of St. Mark's writings.

It is only Theophilus, not Augustine or Ambrose, that St. Mark protests against receiving as a Teacher of the Church. Later in this treatise (chs. 8, 9) St. Mark examines the citations from the "blessed Augustine" and "the divine Father Ambrose" (a distinction which is often retained by Orthodox Fathers in later centuries), refuting some and accepting others. In other writings of St. Mark at this Council he uses the writings of Augustine themselves as an Orthodox source (evidently from the Greek translations of some of his works which had been made after the time of St. Photius). In his "Replies to the Difficulties and Questions of the Cardinals and Other Latin Teachers" (ch. 3), St. Mark quotes from the *Soliloquies* and *On the Trinity,* referring to the author as "blessed Augustine" and using his words effectively against the Latins at the Council (Pogodin, pp. 156-8). In one writing, the "Syllogistic Chapters Against the Latins" (ch. 34), he even refers to "divine Augustine" when again quoting favorably from his *On the Trinity (Pogodin,* p. 268). It should be noted that when St. Mark quotes any later Latin teachers who have no authority in the Orthodox Church, he is careful not to give them any title of praise, whether "blessed" or "divine"; thus, Thomas Aquinas for him is only "Thomas, the Latin teacher" (Ibid., ch. 13; Pogodin, p. 251).

Like St. Photius, St. Mark, seeing that the Latin theologians were quoting the errors of certain Fathers against the teaching of the Church itself, felt it necessary to state the Orthodox teaching regarding Fathers who have erred on some point. He does this in a way similar to St. Photius', but with reference not to Augustine — whose errors he tries to justify and place in the best possible light — or to any other Western Father, but to an Eastern Father who fell into an error certainly no less serious than any of Augustine's. Here is what St. Mark writes:

"With regard to the words which are quoted of the blessed Gregory of Nyssa, it would be better to give them over to silence, and not at all compel us, for the sake of our own defense, to bring them out into the open. For this Teacher is seen to be clearly in agreement with the dogmas of the Origenists and to introduce an end to torments." According to St. Gregory (St. Mark continues), "there will come a final restoration of all, and of the demons themselves, 'that God,' he says, 'may be all in all,' as the Apostle says. Inasmuch as these words have also been quoted, among others, at first we shall reply regarding them as we have received it from our Fathers. It is possible that these are alterations and insertions by certain heretics and Origenists . . But if the Saint was actually of such an opinion, this was when this teaching was a subject of dispute and had not been definitely condemned and rejected by the opposite opinion, which was brought forward at the Fifth Ecumenical Council; so that

there is nothing surprising in the fact that he, being human, erred in precision (of truth), when the same thing happened also with many before him, such as Irenaeus of Lyons and Dionysius of Alexandria and others . . .. Thus, these utterances, if they were actually said by the marvellous Gregory concerning that fire, do not indicate a special cleansing (such as purgatory would be — *ed. note*), but introduce a final cleansing and a final restoration of all; but in no way are they convincing for us, who behold the common judgment of the Church and are guided by the Divine Scriptures, but not beholding what each of the Teachers has written as his personal opinion. And if anyone else has written otherwise about a cleansing fire, we have no need to accept it" ("First Homily on Purgatorial Fire," ch. 11; Pogodin, pp. 68-9).

Significantly, the Latins were shocked at this reply and commissioned their leading theologian, the Spanish Cardinal Juan de Torquemada (uncle of the famous Grand Inquisitor of the Spanish Inquisition) to answer for them, which he did in the following words: "Gregory of Nyssa, without doubt most great among Teachers, handed down in clearest fashion the teaching of purgatorial fire . . . But what you say in answer to this, that being human he could err, seems to us very strange; for Peter and Paul also, and the other Apostles, and the four Evangelists were likewise human, not to mention that Athanasius the Great, Basil, Ambrose, Hilary and others great in the Church were likewise human and consequently could err! Do you not think that this reply of yours oversteps proper bounds? For then the whole of faith wavers, and the whole of the Old and New Testaments, handed down to us through men, are subjected to doubt, because, if one follows your assertion, it was not impossible for them to err. But what then will remain solid in the Divine Scripture? What will have stability? We also acknowledge that it is possible for a man to err in so far as he is human and does anything by his own powers; but in so far as he is guided by the Divine Spirit and tested by the touchstone of the Church in those things which relate to the common faith of dogmatic teaching, then what is written by him, we affirm, is absolutely true" ("Answering Theses of the Latins," ch. 4; Pogodin, pp. 94-5).

The logical end of this Latin search for "perfection" in the Holy Fathers is, of course, Papal infallibility. The logic of this position is exactly the same as that of those who had protested to St. Photius that if Augustine and others had taught incorrectly on any point they should be "cast out together with the heretics."

St. Mark, in his new reply to these statements, repeats the Orthodox view that "it is possible for one to be a Teacher and all the same not say everything absolutely correctly, for what need then would the Fathers have had for

Ecumenical Councils?" — and such private teachings (as opposed to the infallible Scripture and Church Tradition) "we must not believe absolutely or accept without investigation." He then goes into great detail, with many citations from his works, to show that St. Gregory of Nyssa actually did teach the error ascribed to him (which is nothing less than the denial of eternal torment in hell, and universal salvation), and gives the final authoritative word on this matter to Augustine himself.

"That only the canonical Scriptures have infallibility is testified by Blessed Augustine in the words which he writes to Jerome: 'It is fitting to bestow such honor and veneration only to the books of Scripture which are called "canonical", for I absolutely believe that none of the authors who wrote them erred in anything . . . As for other writings, no matter how great was the excellence of their authors in sanctity and learning, in reading them I do not accept their teaching as true solely on the basis that they thus wrote and thought.' Then, in the letter to Fortunatus (St. Mark continues in his citations of Augustine) he writes the following: 'We should not hold the judgment of a man, even though this man might have been orthodox and had a high reputation, as the same kind of authority as the canonical Scriptures, to the extent of considering it inadmissable for us, out of the reverence we owe such men, to disapprove and reject something in their writing if we should happen to discover that they taught other than the truth which, with God's help, has been attained by others or by ourselves. This is how I am with regard to the writings of other men; and I desire that the reader will act thus with regard to my writings also' " (St. Mark, "Second Homily on Purgatorial Fire," chs. 15-16; Pogodin, pp. 127-132).

Thus, the last word on Blessed Augustine is that of Augustine himself; the Orthodox Church down the centuries has in fact treated him exactly as he desired.

OPINION OF BLESSED AUGUSTINE IN MODERN TIMES

THE ORTHODOX FATHERS of modern times have continued to regard Blessed Augustine in the same way as did St. Mark, and there has been no particular controversy associated with his name. In Russia, at least as early as the time of St. Demetrius of Rostov (early 18th century), the custom of referring to him as "Blessed Augustine" had become well established. Here let us say just a word about this title.

In the early centuries of Christianity, the word "blessed" with reference to a man of holy life was used more or less interchangeably with the word "saint" or "holy". This was not the result of any formal "canonization" — which did not exist in those centuries — but was based, rather, chiefly on popular veneration. Thus, St. Martin of Tours (4th century), an unquestioned saint and wonderworker, is referred to by early writers such as St. Gregory of Tours (6th century) sometimes as "blessed" (*beatus*) and sometimes as "saint" (*sanctus*). And so, when Augustine is referred to in the 5th century by St. Faustus of Lerins as "most blessed" (*beatissimus*), in the 6th century by St. Gregory the Great as "blessed" (*beatus*) and "saint" (*sanctus*), in the 9th century by St. Photius as "holy" (*agios*), these different titles all mean the same thing: that Augustine was recognized as belonging to the rank of those outstanding for their sanctity and teaching. In the West during these centuries his feast day was kept; in the East (where no special feast would be kept for Western saints) he was simply regarded as a Father of the Universal Church.

By the time of St. Mark of Ephesus the word "blessed" had come to be used for Fathers of somewhat less authority than the greatest Fathers; thus, he refers to "blessed Augustine" but "divine Ambrose," "blessed Gregory of Nyssa" but "Gregory the Theologian, great among the saints"; but he is by no means entirely consistent in this usage.

Even in modern times the word "blessed" remains somewhat vague in its application. In Russian usage "blessed" (*blazhenny*) can refer to great Fathers around whom there has been some controversy (Augustine and Jerome in the West, Theodoret of Cyrus in the East), but also to fools for Christ (canonized or uncanonized) and to the uncanonized holy persons of recent centuries in general. Even today there is no precise definition of what "blessed" means in the Orthodox Church (as opposed to Roman Catholicism, where "beatification" is a whole legal process in itself), and any "blessed" person who has a recognized place in the Orthodox calendar of saints (as do Augustine, Jerome, Theodoret, and many fools for Christ) could also be called "saint." In Russian Orthodox practice one seldom hears of "Saint Augustine," but almost always of "Blessed Augustine."

In modern times there have been numerous translations of the writings of Blessed Augustine into Greek and Russian, and he has become well known in the Orthodox East. Some of his writings, to be sure, such as his anti-Pelagian treatises and *On the Trinity,* are read only with caution — the same caution with which Orthodox believers read St. Gregory of Nyssa's "On the Soul and the Resurrection" and some other of his writings.

BLESSED AUGUSTINE

The great Russian Father of the late 18th century, St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, quotes from the writings of Blessed Augustine (chiefly from the *Solilo-quies)* as of an Orthodox Father — although of course his main Patristic sources were the Eastern Fathers, and above all St. John Chrysostom.* Augustine's *Confessions* occupied a respected place among Orthodox spiritual books in Russia and even had a decisive effect on the renunciation of the world by the great recluse of the early 19th century, George of Zadonsk. When the latter was in the military service in his youth and was leading an increasingly withdrawn life in preparation for entering a monastery, he was so attracted by a certain colonel's daughter that he had decided to ask her to marry him. Remembering then his cherished desire of abandoning the world, he came to a crisis of indecision and perplexity, which he resolved to end by appealing to the Patristic book he was then reading. As he himself describes this moment: "I was inspired to open the book which lay on the table, thinking to myself: I will follow whatever it opens to at once. I opened the *Confessions* of Augustine. I read: 'He who marries is concerned for a wife, how to please a wife; but he who does not marry is concerned for the Lord, how to please the Lord.' See the rightness of it! What a difference! Reason soundly, choose the better way; do not tarry, decide, follow; nothing hindres you. I decided. My heart was filled with unutterable rejoicing. My soul was in joy. And it seems that my mind was entirely in a heavenly ecstasy.** This experience strongly reminds one of Blessed Augustine's own experience of conversion, when he was inspired to open the Epistles of St. Paul and follow the advice of the first passage on which his eyes fell (*Confessions,* VIII, 12). It should be noted that the spiritual world of Blessed George of Zadonsk was entirely that of the Orthodox Fathers, as we know from the books he read: the Lives of Saints, St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, Patristic commentaries on Scripture.

In the Greek Church in modern times the situation has been much the same. The 18th-century Greek theologian Eustratius Argenti, in his anti-Latin works such as the *Treatise on Unleavened Bread,* uses Augustine as a Patristic authority, but he also notes that Augustine is one of the Fathers who fell into some errors — but without thereby ceasing to be a Father of the Church.*

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* See Nadejda Gorodetzky, *Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk,* Crestwood, N.Y., 1976, p. 118.
** Bishop Nikodim, *Russian Ascetics of the 18th and 19th Centuries,* in Russian, Moscow, 1909, Sept. volume, pp. 542-3.
* See Timothy Ware, *Eustratius Argenti,* Oxford, 1964, pp. 126, 128.

At the end of the 18th century, St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain included the Life of Blessed Augustine in his Synaxarion or Collection of Lives of Saints, whereas before this time he had not been included in Eastern calendars and collections of Saints' Lives. This in itself was nothing remarkable; Augustine was but one of many hundreds of names which St. Nicodemus added to the very incomplete Orthodox Calendar of Saints out of his zeal to give greater glory to God's saints. In the 19th century, out of a similar zeal, the Russian Church took the name of Augustine from St. Nicodemus' Synaxarion and added it to its own calendar. This was not any kind of "canonization" of Blessed Augustine, for he had never been regarded in the East as anything other than a Father and a Saint; it was merely a matter of the enlargement of the Church's calendar to make it more complete — a process that is still going on today.

In the 20th century the name of Blessed Augustine is to be found in the standard Orthodox Calendars, usually under the date of June 15 (together with Blessed Jerome), but sometimes under the date of his repose, August 28. The Greek Church, as a whole has perhaps regarded him with less reserve than the Russian Church, as may be seen, for example, in the official calendar of one of the "Old-Calendarist" Greek Churches today, where he is called, not "Blessed Augustine" as in the Russian Calendar, but "Saint Augustine the Great" (*agios Augustinos o megas*).

The Russian Church, however, has great love for him, even while not according him the title of "great". Archbishop John Maximovitch, when he became ruling bishop of Western Europe, made it a point of showing special reverence for him (together with many other Western Saints); thus, he commissioned the writing of a special church service in his honor (which until then had not existed in the Slavonic Menaion), and this service was officially approved by the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Church outside of Russia under the presidency of Metropolitan Anastassy. Archbishop John celebrated this service every year, wherever he might happen to be, on the feast day of Blessed Augustine.

Perhaps the most balanced critical appraisal of Blessed Augustine in recent times is to be found in the Patrology of Archbishop Philaret of Chernigov, which has been quoted several times above. "He had the very widest influence on his own and subsequent times. But in part he was not understood, in part he himself did not express his thoughts precisely and gave occasion for disputes" (vol. III, p. 7). "Possessing a logical mind and an abundance of feeling, the Teacher of Hippo did not, however, possess in the same abundance a metaphysical mind; in his works there is much ingenuity but little originality

in thought, much logical strictness but not many especially exalted ideas. One likewise cannot ascribe to him a thorough theological erudition. Augustine wrote about everything, just like Aristotle, whereas his excellent works could only be and only were his systematic examinations of subjects and his moral reflections . . . The highest quality in him is the profound, sincere piety with which all his works are filled" (Ibid., p. 35). Among his moral writings which Archbishop Philaret regards most highly are his *Soliloquies;* his treatises, letters and sermons on monastic struggle and the virtues, on care for the dead, on prayer to the saints on the veneration of relics; and of course his justly-renowned *Confessions,* "which without doubt can strike anyone to the depths of his soul by the sincerity of their contrition and warm one by the warmth of the piety which is so essential on the path of salvation" (Ibid., p. 23).

The "controversial" aspects of Blessed Augustine's dogmatic writings have sometimes taken up so much attention that this other, moral side of his works has been largely neglected. But his main benefit to us today is probably precisely as a *Father of Orthodox piety* — something with which he was filled to overflowing. Modern scholars, indeed, often find it disappointing that such an "intellectual giant" should have been such "a typical child of his age, even in matters where we should not expect him to be so," that "strangely enough, Augustine fits into a landscape filled with dreams, devils and spirits," and that his acceptance of miracles and visions "reveals a credulity which to us today seeems incredible."* Here Blessed Augustine parts company with the "sophisticated" students of theology in our own day; but he is one with the simple Orthodox faithful, as well as with all the Holy Fathers of East and West who, whatever their various failings and differences in theoretical points of doctrine, had a single deeply Christian heart and soul. It is this that makes him unquestionably an *Orthodox* Father and creates an impassable abyss between him and all his heterodox "disciples" of later centuries — but makes him kin to all those who are clinging to true Christianity, Holy Orthodoxy in our own days.

But in many points of doctrine also, Blessed Augustine reveals himself as a teacher for the Orthodox. Especially there should be mentioned his teaching on the Millenium. After being himself attracted to a rather spiritualized form of chiliasm in his earlier years as a Christian, in his mature years he became one of the leading combatters of this heresy which has led astray so many heretics in ancient and modern times who read the *Apocalypse* of St. John in an overly-literal way and not according to the Church's tradition. In the true Orthodox interpretation, which Blessed Augustine taught, the "thousand years"

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* F. Van Der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop,* Sheed and Ward, New York, 1961, p. 553.

of the *Apocalypse* (ch. 20:1-6) is the whole time from the First Coming to the Second Coming of Christ, when the devil is indeed "bound" (greatly restricted in his power to tempt the faithful) and the saints reign with Christ in the grace-given life of the Church (*City of God,* Book XX, chs. 7-9).

In iconography the features of Blessed Augustine are quite distinctive. Perhaps the earliest surviving icon of him, a 6th-century fresco in the Lateran Library in Rome, is unmistakably based on a portrait from life; the same emaciated, ascetic face and sparse beard appear in a 7th-century icon showing him together with Blessed Jerome and St. Gregory the Great. The icon in an 11th-century manuscript of Tours is more stylized, but still obviously based on the same original. Later Western paintings lose all contact with the original (as happened with most early saints in the West), showing him merely as a medieval or modern Latin prelate.

A NOTE ON THE CONTEMPORARY DETRACTORS OF BLESSED AUGUSTINE

ORTHODOX THEOLOGY in the 20th century has been undergoing a "patristic revival." Beyond doubt there is much that is positive in this "revival." Some of the Orthodox textbooks of recent centuries have taught certain doctrines with a partially Western (especially Roman Catholic) vocabulary and slant, and have failed to properly appreciate some of the profoundest Orthodox Fathers, especially of more recent times (St. Symeon the New Theologian, St. Gregory Palamas, St. Gregory the Sinaite). The 20th-century "patristic revival" has at least partially corrected these shortcomings and has freed the Orthodox academies and seminaries of some of the unnecessary "Western influences" that had been present in them. Actually, this has been a continuation of the modern movement of Orthodox self-awareness which was begun in the 18th and early 19th centuries by St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite, St. Macarius of Corinth, Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky, Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, and others both in Greece and Russia.

But there has been a negative side also of this "patristic revival." For one thing, in the 20th century it has been and remains very largely an "academic" phenomenon: abstract, remote from actual life, bearing the stamp of some of the petty passions of the modern academic world — superiority, smugness, lack of charity in criticizing the views of others, the formation of parties or cliques of those who are "in-the-know" and are aware of which views are "in fashion" and which are not. Some students have such an excessive zeal for the "patristic

revival" that they find "Western influence" everywhere they look, become hypercritical of the "Westernized" Orthodoxy of the past several centuries, and have an extremely disdainful attitude towards some of the most respected Orthodox teachers of those centuries (as well as of the present day, and even of antiquity) because of their "Western" views. Little do such "zealots" suspect that they are thus cutting away the Orthodox ground from under their own feet and reducing the unbroken Orthodox tradition to a little "party-line" which a small group of them shares (supposedly) with the "great Fathers" of the past. In this case the "patristic revival" comes perilously close to a kind of Protestantism. *

Blessed Augustine in recent years has become a victim of this negative side of the "patristic revival." The increased *theoretical* knowledge of Orthodox theology in our times (as opposed to the theology of the Holy Fathers, which was inseparably bound up with Christian life) has produced much criticism of Blessed Augustine for his theological errors. Some theological students even specialize in "tearing to pieces" Augustine and his theology, leaving it scarcely possible for one to believe that he can still be a Father of the Church. Sometimes such students come into open conflict with Orthodox theological scholars of the "old school," who in seminary have been taught some of the defects of Blessed Augustine's theology, but accept him as one Father among many, paying no special attention to him. These latter scholars are closer to the Orthodox opinion of Blessed Augustine down the centuries, while the former are guilty of exaggerating Augustine's faults rather than excusing them (as the great Fathers of the past have done), and in their academic "correctness" often lack that certain inward humility and refinement that mark the authentic transmission of Orthodox tradition from father to son (and not merely from professor to student). Let us look at just one example of this wrong attitude towards Blessed Augustine of some modern students of theology.

An Orthodox priest and professor at a theological school which has experienced the "patristic revival" is giving a lecture on the differences between the mentality of East and West. In discussing the "disastrous distortions of Christian morality" in the modern West, and in particular a false "puritanism" and sense of "perfection," he states: "I cannot trace out the origin of this notion. I only know that Augustine was already introducing it when, if I am not mistaken, he said in his confessions that after his baptism he had no sexual thoughts. I hate to question Augustine's honesty, but it is absolutely impossible for me

* For a criticism of one such result of the "patristic revival," see Fr. M. Pomazansky, "The Liturgical Theology of Fr. A. Schmemann," *The Orthodox Word,* 1970, no. 6, pp. 260-280.

to accept his statement. I suspect that he made the statement because he already had the notion that since he was a Christian, he was not supposed to have any sexual thoughts. The understanding of Eastern Christianity at the same time was entirely different" (*The Hellenic Chronicle,* Nov. 11, 1976, p. 6). Here Augustine has become, quite simply, a scapegoat on which to pin any views which one finds "un-Orthodox" or "Western"; anything rotten in the West must come from him as its ultimate source! And it is even considered possible, against all laws of fairness, to look into his mind and ascribe to him the most primitive kind of thinking, not to be found even among the freshest converts to Orthodoxy today.

In actual fact, of course, Blessed Augustine never made any such statement. In his *Confessions* he is quite frank in speaking of the "fire of sensuality" which was still in him, and of "how I am still troubled by this kind of evil" (*Confessions* X, 30); and his teaching on sexual morality and the battle against the passions is in general identical with the teaching of the Eastern Fathers of his time — both of which are very different from the modern Western attitude which the lecturer rightly sees as mistaken and un-Christian. (In actual fact, however, the grace of being freed from sexual temptations *has* been given to some Fathers — in the East if not in the West; see *The Lausiac History,* ch. 29, where the ascetic Elias of Egypt, as a result of an angelic visitation, was granted such freedom from lust that he could say, "Passion comes no more into my mind.")

We do not need to be overly harsh ourselves in judging such distortions of the "patristic revival"; so many inadequate and conflicting ideas, many of them truly foreign to the Church, are presented today in the name of Christianity and even of Orthodoxy that one can easily excuse those whose Orthodox views and evaluations are sometimes lacking in balance, as long as it is truly the purity of Christianity that they are sincerely seeking. This very study of Blessed Augustine, indeed, has shown us that precisely this is the attitude of the Orthodox Fathers with regard to those who have erred in good faith. We have much to learn from the generous, tolerant, and forgiving attitude of these Fathers.

Where there are errors, to be sure, we must strive to correct them; the "Western influences" of modern times must be combatted, the errors of ancient Fathers must not be followed. With regard to Blessed Augustine in particular, it cannot be doubted that his teaching missed the mark in many respects: with regard to the Holy Trinity, grace and nature, and other doctrines; his teaching is not "heretical," but it is exaggerated, and it was the Eastern Fathers who taught the true and profound Christian doctrines on these points.

To some extent the faults of Augustine's teaching are the faults of the Western mentality, which on the whole did not grasp Christian doctrine as profoundly as the East. St. Mark of Ephesus makes a particular remark to the Latin theologians at Ferrara-Florence which might be taken as a summary of the differences between East and West: "Do you see how superficially your teachers touch on the meaning, and how they do not penetrate into the meaning, as for example do John Chrysostom and Gregory the Theologian and other universal luminaries of the Church?" *(First Homily on Purgatorial Fire,"* ch. 8; Pogodin, p. 66). Some Western Fathers, to be sure, such as Sts. Ambrose, Hilary of Poitiers, Cassian — do penetrate deeper and are more in the Eastern spirit; but as a general rule it is indeed the Eastern Fathers who teach most penetratingly and profoundly of Christian doctrine.

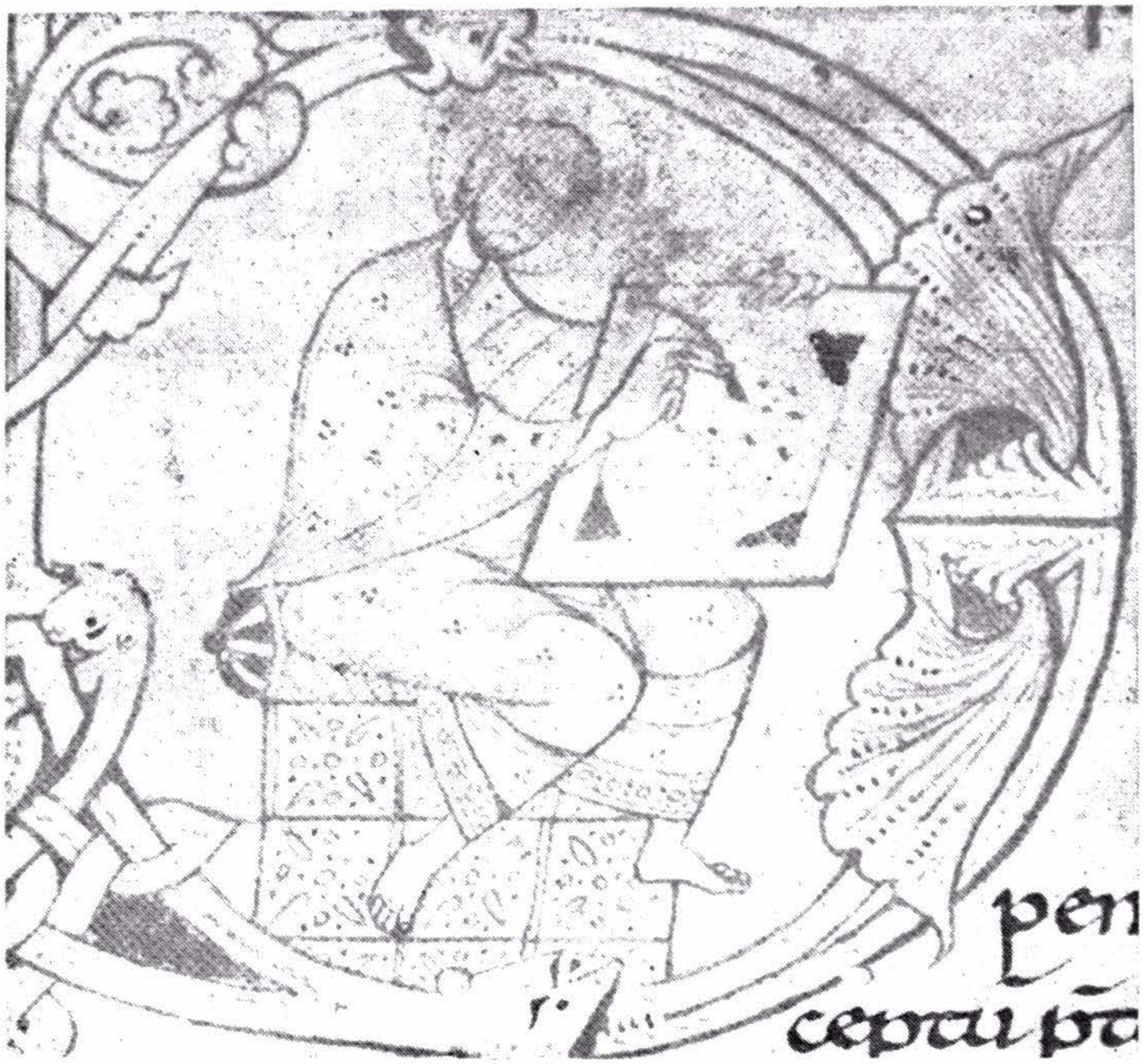
But this in no way gives us grounds for any kind of "Eastern triumphalism." If we boast of our great Fathers, let us beware of being like the Jews who boasted of the very prophets whom they stoned (Matt. 23:29-31). We, the last Christians, are not worthy of the inheritance which they have left us; we are unworthy of even beholding from afar the exalted theology which they both taught and lived; we quote the great Fathers but we do not have their spirit ourselves. As a general rule, it may even be said that it is usually those who cry the loudest against "Western influence" and are the least forgiving of those whose theology is not "pure" — who are themselves the most infected by Western influences, often of unsuspected kinds. The spirit of disparagement of all who do not agree with one's "correct" views, whether on theology, iconography, church services, spiritual life, or whatever subject, has become far too common today, especially among new converts to the Orthodox Faith, in whom it is particularly unfitting and often has disastrous results. But even among "Orthodox peoples" this spirit has become too prevalent (obviously as a result of "Western influence"!), as may be seen in the unfortunate recent attempt in Greece to deny the sanctity of St. Nectarios of Pentapolis, a great wonderworker of our own century, because he has supposedly taught incorrectly on some doctrinal points.

Today all we Orthodox Christians, whether of East or West — if only we are honest and sincere enough to admit it — are in a "Western captivity" worse than any our Fathers in the past have known. In previous centuries, Western influences may have produced some theoretical formulations of doctrine that were wanting in preciseness; but today the "Western captivity" surrounds and often governs the very atmosphere and tone of our Orthodoxy, which is often theoretically "correct" but wanting in true Christian spirit, in the indefinable savor of true Christianity.

Let us then be more humble, more loving and forgiving in our approach to the Holy Fathers. Let the test of our continuity with the unbroken Christian tradition of the past be, not only our attempt to be precise in doctrine, but also our love for the men who have handed it down to us — of whom Blessed Augustine was certainly one, as was also St. Gregory of Nyssa, despite their errors. Let us be in agreement with our great Eastern Father St. Photius of Constantinople, and "not take as doctrine those areas in which they strayed, but *we embrace the men.*"

And Blessed Augustine has something indeed to teach our "precise" and "correct" — but cold and unfeeling — generation of Orthodox Christians. The exalted teaching of the Philokalia is now "in fashion"; but how many who read this book have first gone through the "ABC's" of profound repentance, warmth of heart, and genuine Orthodox piety that shine through every page of the justly-renowned *Confessions* of Augustine? This book, the history of Blessed Augustine's own conversion, has by no means lost its significance today; fervent converts will find in it much of their own path through sin and error to the Orthodox Church, and an antidote against some of the "convert temptations" of our own times. Without the fire of authentic zeal and piety which the *Confessions* reveal, our Orthodox spirituality is a sham and a mockery, and partakes of the spirit of the coming Antichrist as surely as the doctrinal apostasy that surrounds us on all sides.

"The thought of Thee stirs man so deeply that he cannot be content unless he praises Thee; for Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts find no peace until they come to rest in Thee" (Blessed Augustine, *Confessions*, I, 1).



Blessed Augustine as interpreter
of the Psalms
11th-century manuscript of Tours

The earliest surviving icon
of Blessed Augustine
(6th-century fresco in the
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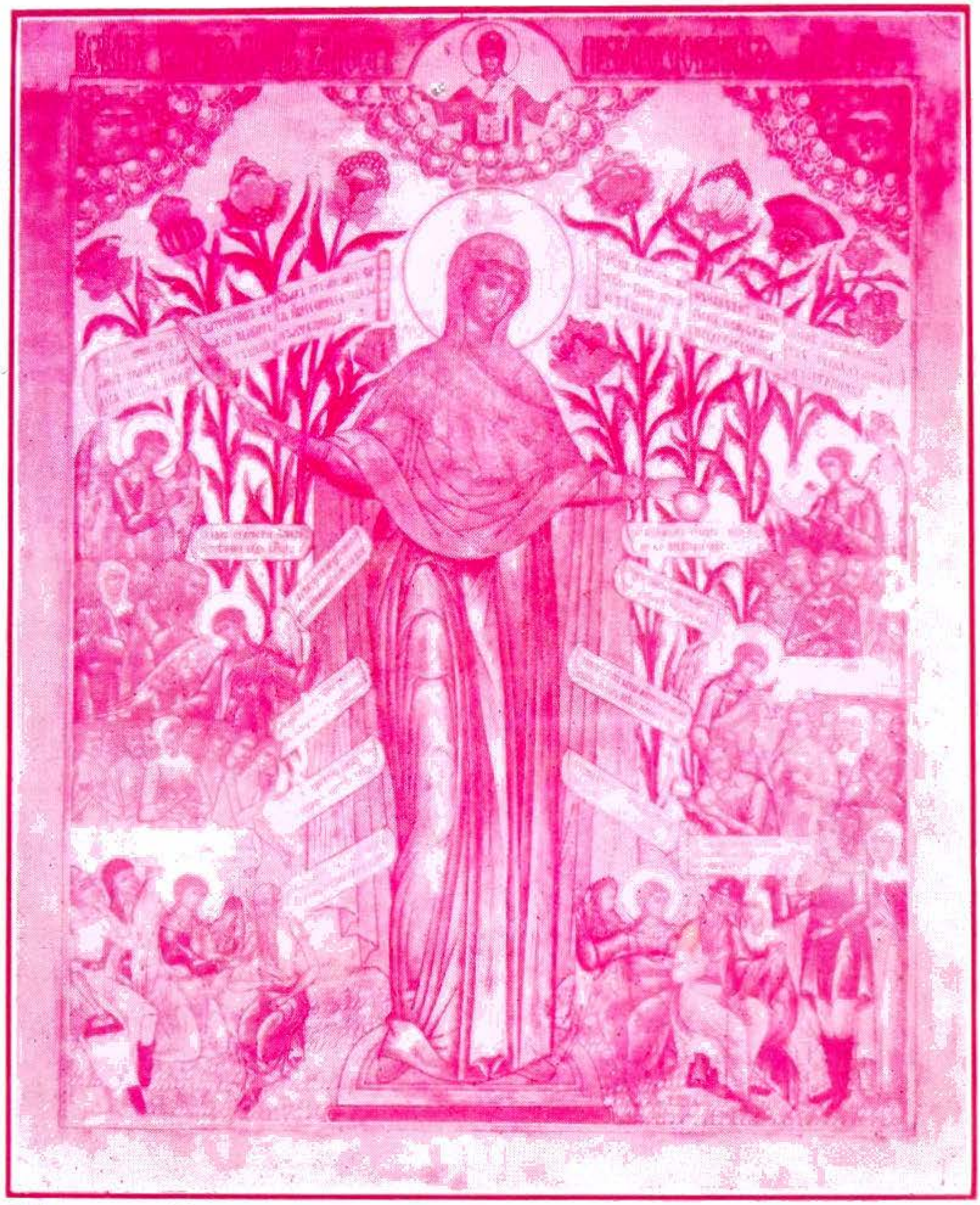

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